



Tales honor past, present heroes

By Senior Airman James Croxon
Public Affairs

The popular image of World War II consists of images of our American men fighting the Axis powers. The images that are lacking are the women of the nurse corps who patched up those soldiers, ensuring they could face and defend the enemy.

A local Grand Forks woman was among those pioneering, brave veterans.

Mrs. Ann Walker's war story begins straight out of school. "I graduated from St. John's Nursing College in Fargo in 1943," she recalled. "After I got my degree, I went to work at a local hospital for a few months. That's when my life changed."

In late June of that year, an American Red Cross recruiter visited her workplace and spoke of the need for qualified nurses to help the war effort. Mrs. Walker immediately signed up to do what she could in support of the world's monumental.

After a few weeks of basic training, 2nd Lt.

Hoffman (her maiden name) boarded a ship bound for her final destination; Newton Abbot Hospital near Devon, England.

"At first, we didn't have much to do. We were building up for the coming invasion of Normandy."

"The winters were foggy and cold," she recalled. "The girls in my barracks were only allowed one pail of coal in the evening. Being from North Dakota, I was used to the cold but not the dampness that seeped into our bones each night."

The quiet cold was shortly interrupted by the cries of wounded Allied Soldiers and Sailors. "April 28, 1944; it's a day that has been in my mind all these years. I'll never forget it. You never get the sounds of battle and dying out of your mind."

On that night, according to Mrs. Walker, a German U-boat surfaced, apparently gathering intelligence on the mustering Allies. As it left the harbor it dropped a charge that startled the American forces. The confusion caused the Army and Navy to fire upon each other.

"Our little hospital took in what we could. Every bed was full as they shipped more wounded further inland. I heard it estimated that between 750 and 1,200 servicemen lost their lives that night to friendly fire."

According to Mrs. Walker, the wounded were eventually discharged or moved and she found herself in charge of the ward that was set aside for those who were briefed about the upcoming invasion of Normandy.

"When June 6 came, we knew we would get back a lot of wounded but no one could prepare us for what we saw. The first to come in were the paratroopers. The poor fellows would get hung up in trees or break bones on their landings and the enemy would shoot them without mercy."

The wounded found themselves in her care, some for several weeks and she developed friendships with many of them.

"I think the friendships made it harder. I remember one fellow who was going into battle. He knew he was likely to be hurt and begged me to make him a first aid kit."

She wasn't able to give him a full kit, as all the supplies were for the hospital. However, she was able to snatch a few things and sent him off with some pain killers and bandages.

"I never saw him again. Almost every troop we got to know never came back," she said grimly.

According to Mrs. Walker, the war left nothing intact. It seemed to destroy things in cycles. "We would have periods without any patients and then the wounded would pour in. Those fighting in Northern Europe came back with blackened, frozen limbs; those fighting in Normandy came back with broken bones and bullet wounds."

Even the buildings were not left intact. "Many, many historical buildings were destroyed. Every time we visited the cities something else was destroyed."

Lieutenant Ann Walker came home 26 months from the time she left permanently changed from who she was before. Had she stayed home she would have seen injuries and accidents but only a small fraction of what she saw those two years in England. Was it worth it?

"The soldiers needed us," she declared. "America needed us. I've never been able to forget what I saw,



Mrs. Ann Walker, who now lives in Grand Forks, poses with her fellow nurse corps members in England in 1944. These women stuck together during World War II

War never far for Vet

By Airman 1st Class Ashley Coomes
Public Affairs

When Tom Bernotas visits the Vietnam memorial in Washington D.C., he realizes the war is never very far away from him.

"People will come up to me and say 'welcome home,'" said Mr. Bernotas.

Today, he continues serving the country as a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and was the state commander for North Dakota in 2003. He has vowed to never stop serving.

Mr. Bernotas's service began as a munitions troop with the Air Force at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, in 1969.

He said he was reluctant to make any close friends, because losing someone close was probably the most difficult part of being there.

"A piece of every Vietnam veteran died in that jungle," he said, adding that being there changed him.

One of the biggest changes was learning to control his fear to survive.

One night, he was almost captured by the enemy, but managed to escape by crawling through the jungle.

"It was raining and black. I was afraid I would crawl up on a snake in the jungle, but I was more afraid of the enemy finding me. I could hear the Viet Cong behind, looking for me," said Mr. Bernotas. Fortunately, he was able to control his fear and made it back to American lines.

"There was not a day in Vietnam that I was not under attack or small arms fire," he said. One night while he was patrolling, the Viet Cong tried to come through the wire to blow up an aircraft. An alert was called. "We killed a half of a dozen Viet Cong before they retreated," he said.

There was only one American casualty.

It was tough enough being there and having a close friend die just made it

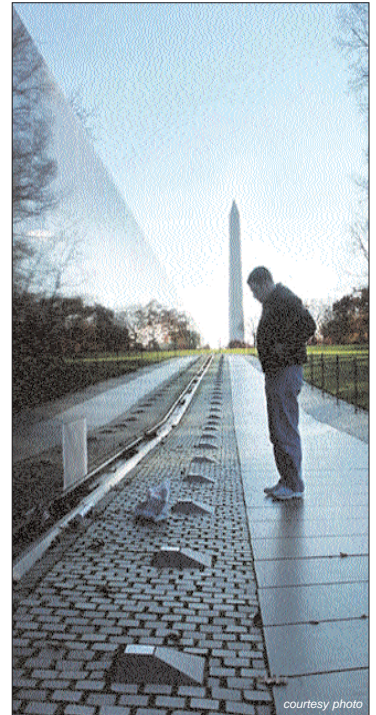
harder, Mr. Bernotas said. To deal with the pressure, some soldiers turned to drugs and alcohol. He did not use drugs, but he did drink to escape.

"For 17 years I could not speak to my wife or kids about it," he said. It was only after counseling that he could face and deal with the memories.

"I can remember coming back from the war, being at the dinner table and hearing a car backfire. I hit the floor to take cover," he said.

"What hurts the most as a military person is serving my country because that is what I was asked to do and instead of a 'Thank you,' I was labeled baby killer," he said, adding that he was glad that today when soldiers leave for war, they leave as heroes and return as heroes.

"I have people ask me if I would do it all over again. I reply absolutely. I believed in a cause that my government asked me to do it and I was willing to give my life for my



Bonds developed during deployment

By Airman 1st Class Ashley Coomes
Public Affairs

Recently, a Grand Forks Air Force Base security forces Airman patrolled the streets in an Iraqi city and came upon a young Iraqi girl whose hand was covered in tattered bandages.

The Airman learned that the girl had burned her hand and gave her burn medicine and re-banded her wounds.

This one event represents the strides Warriors of the North, and thousands of other servicemembers are making in the rebuilding of Iraq - one person at a time.

While deployed to, Iraq last February, Airman 1st Class Monica Carlross, 319th Security Forces Squadron, patrolled outside the wire and was responsible for finding improvised explosive devices that could injure or kill military personnel and civilians.

Other missions included Operation Outreach, a humanitarian project where she handed out clothing and hygiene products to Iraqis.

But the thought of war never left her mind.

"The threat level was not high in our location, but there were rocket attacks and hostile fire.

There was even an incident where a vehicle tried to force entry into the base."

Despite those events, Airman Carlross was grateful to be witness to the developing bonds between Americans and Iraqis.

"I was on guard one time while an officer talked with some Iraqi city leaders. I watched them sit under the tent discussing problems and how to solve them. I was really impressed by the developing communication," said Airman Carlross.



Airman 1st Class Monica Carlross rides on top of a humvee as she patrols the streets in Iraq while deployed last summer.

Tankers return from deployment to Fairchild

By Airman 1st Class Ashley Coomes
Public Affairs

After six long months of runway construction, more than 300 Warriors of the North and the base's aircraft who deployed to Fairchild Air Force Base, Wash., and Fargo International Airport returned home Oct. 30.

"We are really excited, after six

months of superb work done on our runway, we are finally able to reunite our wing," said Col. Lee Deremer, 319th Operations Group commander.

The project began April 20, with the deployment of 20 Grand Forks Air Force Base planes to Fairchild Air Force Base and 2 planes to Fargo International Airport. Aircrew and maintainers also deployed to these locations to support the wing's mission, as

well as medical, services, air traffic control and airfield operations personnel.

These deployed Warriors not only adjusted to working in new environments, but were also able to maintain the highest air refueling capability in all of Air Mobility Command, said Maj. Pat Day, who organized today's welcome back ceremony (see sidebar.).

"In fiscal year 2005, we provided 30 percent of all our Air Force's refueling capability, including active duty, Guard and Reserves," he added. "This speaks volumes on the dedication and standards of quality our personnel have."

"I'm proud of the job we did out there. Any kind of move is hard and there's always an adjustment period. Many of us had families and really missed them, but we knew people were counting on us to make the mission happen and so we came together to do it," said Staff Sgt. Camilo Bloch, 319th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

The first plane returned from Fairchild Oct. 30, bringing about 30 Airmen, who said they were eager to be back home to see loved ones. Many also expressed gratitude for the support they received during their deployment.

"It's a great feeling to be recognized. The community at Fairchild, like the one here, was very supportive. People would see you in uniform and say 'thank you.' For me, that was one of the most memorable things about this deployment," added Sergeant Bloch.

Fairchild and Spokane's support was not only important to Airmen and their families, but to the nation as a whole, said Col. Bill Bender, 319th Air Refueling Wing commander.

The impact of the deployment and return was keenly felt by family members.

"We're happy to have our families and jets back. It's a part of the community that we've been missing," said Airman 1st Class Jennifer Coviello, wife of Senior Airman Rob Coviello, who deployed twice to support the wing's deployed mission.

Those feelings were echoed by Colonel Bender, who summed it up saying, "We are excited by the safe return of all of our Warriors of the North and our aircraft as we look forward to once again taking off and landing at our own Grand Forks Air Force Base."



Photo by Airman 1st Class Chad Kellum

The first KC-135 to land on the base's new runway touched down Oct. 30 at approximately 1:05 p.m.

Warrior finds satisfaction in making difference

For many, volunteerism is an important characteristic of military life. Airman 1st Class Matt Donovan, 905th Air Refueling Squadron will tell you he is definitely one who believes that.

When he's not on duty at the 905th, he stands ready as a volunteer for the Emerado Fire Department. This includes training twice a month to keep his skills sharp, skills he's looking forward to sharing.

"I'm helping to start an Explorer group that introduces boys and girls to firefighting. They will learn the basics, including finding their way around the fire house and maintaining the equipment. They will also do volunteer work and attend wilderness camp," he said.

Once a week, Airman Donovan also donates his time teaching rock climbing certification class at the fitness center and has helped local Cub Scouts earn their mountaineering badge.

Airman Donovan's contributions don't just extend to kids, he has also taken on extra duty in his squadron as the unit fitness program manager and physical training leader.

"I am in charge of administering fitness tests, keeping fitness records, and leading weekly squadron fitness training," he explained. His squadron had its best fitness scores for the past two years under his leadership.

Whether home or deployed, Airman Donovan says he always pushes himself toward excellence.

In fact, deployed to two different locations for 137 days in the past six months, he was named Airman of the month for the squadron and for the operations group.

"By getting involved, you not only give something back to the community, but to yourself. It's important to have ways to express yourself and work hard for something you like doing," he said.

Base spirit; CFC success

By Capt. Michael Meridith
Public Affairs

"This was the most successful Combined Federal Campaign drive in this wing's history - and certainly the most generous," said 319th Air Refueling Wing Commander Bill Bender recently, referring to the government's annual fund-raising drive for charity.

In total, the base drive, which lasted from Oct. 3 to Nov. 11, raised more than \$107,000 for various international, U.S. and local charities.

Just as important, according to base CFC coordinator Maj. Janelle Quinn, was the fact that CFC key workers were able to achieve 100 percent contact - giving every base member a chance to participate.

"We could not have done it without our CFC key workers beating the streets," she said. "They were phenomenal and I am tremendously grateful."

More than two dozen base units were recognized with gold certificates acknowledging their special efforts in raising funds, a fact acknowledged by Colonel Bender, who said, "We went way above and beyond and it really speaks of our wing."

Pat Berger, President and CEO of the Grand Forks United Way (which has primary responsibility for the local campaign), said that the results of the drive reflected the base's spirit of giving.

"You guys made it happen and surpassed what we expected. Charitable organizations across the country thank you. Your support is truly appreciated and through CFC you are making an important difference."

Heroes live forever...

Through the voice of one man

By Staff Sgt. Amanda Callahan
Public Affairs

When you ask John Hanson about his Air Force past, you get stories of bravery, honor and sacrifice about the many Soldiers and Airmen he has come to know over the years.

Mr. Hanson, a community readiness consultant at the family support center on base and an active member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, enlisted in the Air Force in 1969 as a heavy equipment mechanic. After being stationed here for nearly a year, he received orders to Kimpo Air Force Base, Korea, a few miles from the demilitarized zone.

Though his stories include the North Korean military lobbing a few mortars over the DMZ to say “hello,” Mr. Hanson is more likely to talk about his uncle, who was in the Bataan Death March after being shot down by the Japanese during World War II.

“He never talked about it to the family,” Mr. Hanson recalled. “Until one day at a family reunion, after I’d gotten back [from Korea].” His uncle told him of the march and the despair the prisoners felt. “If they stopped for water, the Japanese would kill them. If they tried to help another prisoner, they would be stabbed with a bayonet and shot.”

His uncle asked him to keep these memories from the family until after he was gone, a request Mr. Hanson honored.

With seamless transition, Mr. Hanson also recalled the positive side of being a military member overseas.

“I started helping out at an orphanage while at Kimpo,” he said. “It was fun to take the kids things they’d never seen before. We took them popcorn one day and tried to explain how to pop it. They couldn’t speak English and we couldn’t speak Korean, so popcorn was everywhere by the time we finished,” he said with a smile.

Not all of his memories of Korea were so pleasant, though. “We were sitting at our shop after work and watched a helicopter go down into a rice paddy. We went in to help, not thinking of where we were going...only that we needed to get the guys out.”

They were able to help the crew out, but they were soon confronted by medics. “You need to remove your uniforms and prepare for sterilization,” the medics informed the rescuers.

After removing their uniforms, the Airmen received a gamma globulin injection, a very painful shot given in the buttocks to help prevent diseases.

“I had to get one every six months after that,” he said.

“The rice patties were fertilized with human feces, but we didn’t care; we just knew we had to get those guys out,” Mr. Hanson said, and added grimly, “I would do it again.”

Helping others, with little regard for himself is a common theme to all of Mr. Hanson’s stories.

“As a member of the VFW, I live by a motto; honor the dead by helping the living,” he said somberly. “That’s what it’s about for me. I feel it’s important to get the stories out; to preserve history.”

One of those stories was about a man whose

father was shot down during Vietnam when he was only three.

That 3-year-old is now a man, who recently arranged for his father’s remains to be interred in Arlington National Cemetery.

“While he was waiting for the funeral, he decided to play a round of golf,” Mr. Hanson explained. “An older gentleman offered to play the course with him.” As they played, the young man explained his purpose in Arlington. “As it turned out, the older gentleman knew his father well; he was his father’s wingman on the day he was shot down.”

The older gentleman told the young man of his father’s bravery; how he didn’t eject to save his own life, but instead waited to deliver his bombs. “He was the last to hear the pilot; before going down, he heard ‘ordnance delivered.’”

Mr. Hanson’s stories span the decades even to the present.

A few years ago, he spoke to the race marshal of Veteran’s Day run. “She was 82 years young, and a veteran nurse of the Battle of the Bulge. She told stories of the frozen limbs and the men she helped back into combat and never saw again. I am very proud to know her; she is a true hero.”

John Hanson is not just a man of many stories, he is a man on a mission to tell those that remind us of the men and women that served heroically before the age of satellites and night-vision goggles. He sees the importance of honoring the nation’s veterans by telling their stories and allowing their legacy to live, even though many of them did not.

From routine deployment to Pakistan relief mission for millions

By Airman 1st Class Ashley Coomes
Public Affairs

A routine deployment turned into a disaster relief mission when a Warrior of the North suddenly found himself near the center of an earthquake that killed more than 50,000 people and left nearly 3 million homeless.

Master Sergeant Jeff Bohi, 319th Comptroller Squadron, was deployed to Islamabad, Pakistan, when the Oct. 8 earthquake hit. Only a few scant miles from the earthquake's epicenter, he quickly found himself surrounded by the turmoil created by the disaster and a witness to tragedy.

"I saw an entire building that had crumbled to the ground," he said. "Also, many buildings endured foundation problems that left them unusable, leaving people homeless. People who had houses were sleeping on their lawns, some set up tents, and I saw one Pakistani gentlemen sleeping under his truck."

Sergeant Bohi also added that one Pakistani man he knew had lost most of his family in the earthquake, one of thousands with the same story.

"He didn't make much money and couldn't afford to take any time off to take care of his family's affairs so I gave him some money to help out."

Sergeant Bohi's gesture of kindness was echoed by similar gestures from

thousands of Americans as well as the Department of Defense's massive relief efforts.

As of Oct. 31, those efforts have included 885 helicopter missions evacuating 3,138 people and delivery of 3.5 million pounds of supplies to quake-stricken areas.

The Air Force contribution began with the arrival of elements of the 621st Contingency Response Group, who set up air operations to ensure the smooth flow of relief supplies. Since then, Air Force C-17 and C-130 aircraft have delivered supplies to areas when the weather was too bad or the altitude too high for the choppers to fly. In total, there have been 95 airlift missions to Pakistan, carrying 882 tons of humanitarian-assistance supplies, 726 tons of equipment and 53 tons of medical supplies.

As a paying agent, Sergeant Bohi has played a role in the Air Force's relief efforts as well.

"We started buying supplies for the American military during the original build-up of the deployment site," Sergeant Bohi said. "As the relief efforts have grown, additional contracting officers and paying agents have been brought in to help these teams take care of the mission. My job as a paying agent is to find out the needs of these teams and coordinate with local vendors to purchase those items."

Sergeant Bohi added that one of



Courtesy photo

Trucks filled with relief supplies clog the streets of Islamabad, Pakistan and fill the windshield of Grand Forks Air Force base's Master Sgt. Jeff Bohi's truck as aid reaches those affected by the earthquake.

the most gratifying aspects of the relief efforts has been the cooperation between different nations as they work for a single cause: to save lives and end suffering.

"Americans have been working side by side with a host of other countries," he said. "At any given time, you can see relief aircraft from all over the world including Thailand, Russia, and

Germany."

Sergeant Bohi also noted that all these efforts have been warmly received by the Pakistani people.

"For the most part, they are very grateful for our efforts," he said. "In fact, several Pakistani people have yelled out to us, 'Thank you, America.'"

Editor's Note: Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service, contributed to this story.